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MEDIA RELEASE

24 July, 1986

BEATING TRIGGERS EAST TIMOR CHURCH BOYCOTT

In a bold gesture of protest, the head of the Catholic Church in East Timor, Mgr Carlos Belo, has instructed all priests and religious in East Timor to boycott Government run courses in Indonesian state ideology, the Pancasila.

Commenting on the development, a spokesperson for the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, Mr Pat Walsh, said today: 'The Bishop's action demonstrates how gravely he views the situation in East Timor and is clear evidence that relations between the Indonesian military and the Catholic Church, to which most Timorese belong, remain tense'. Under President Suharto the Pancasila is sacrosanct and courses in its principles compulsory.

The Bishop's instruction was triggered by the brutal beating of the parish priest of Lospalos-Lautem by Indonesian soldiers on June 27.

In a blunt letter to the Indonesian authorities dated July 7 (a copy of which was received in Melbourne this week), Mgr Belo wrote: 'I wish to inform you that none of the priests and religious of the diocese of Dili will participate in the Pancasila program designed for Church personnel in East Timor'.

'This is a sign of solidarity with Fr Walter van Wouwe SDB, parish priest of Lospalos-Lautem who was brutally beaten on June 27 by two members of ABRI (the Indonesian army) in Lautem', said the letter.

'Our refusal to participate in the above mentioned seminar is our strongly felt protest against the brutal and inhuman behaviour that continues to occur and which belittles our pastors'.

'What is the use of talking about Pancasila while priests who have given themselves to the moral and material support of the people are disregarded ... and are the objects of suspicion, threats and even crude beatings'.

The letter concludes by saying the boycott will apply 'this year and in the coming years' unless positive measures are undertaken by the authorities to ensure Church personnel can exercise their duties in complete freedom.

The Lospalos region at the eastern end of East Timor, where Fr Wouwe's

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parish is located, has been the scene of constant clashes between Fretilin guerillas and the Indonesian military for many years.

Copies of Mgr Belo's letter were also sent to the Indonesian armed forces area commander and to the Vatican's Ambassador to Jakarta who, under an arrangement reflecting the un-determined status of East Timor, is directly responsible for the affairs of the East Timor Church.

New arrests

In a separate development, mass arrests of Timorese civilians suspected of supporting the resistance have been reported in a letter from Dili dated 15 July 1986.

According to the letter, the arrests were a preventative measure on the part of the Indonesian authorities to offset any trouble on the eve of Indonesia's celebration of the 10th anniversary of its incorporation of East Timor as the Republic's 27th province. Big celebrations were reportedly held in Dili to mark the occasion on July 17, and were attended by some foreign media and diplomats.

80 people were reported arrested in Baucau, and large, but unknown numbers in Lospalos, Viqueque and the capital, Dili.

Further information

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